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B<sup>3</sup>ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates, first, to methods and compositions for the modulation of acid sphingomyelinase (ASM)-related processes, including apoptosis. Such apoptosis can include, but is not limited to, environmental stress-induced apoptosis such as, for example, ionizing radiation and/or chemotherapeutic agent-induced apoptosis. Apoptosis can be characterized by a cellular morphology comprising cellular condensation, nuclear condensation or zeiosis. The present invention further relates to methods for the identification of compounds which modulate (*i.e.*, either increase or decrease) sensitivity to ASM-related processes, including apoptosis.

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